

**Amendments to the Claims**

This listing of claims, if entered, will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the above-identified application.

**Listing of Claims**

1. **(Currently Amended)** A method comprising:  
detecting a failure of a first link, wherein  
said first link is between a network element and an upstream portion of a communications network, and  
said first link is associated with a virtual network; and  
in response to said detecting, maintaining a communications channel between said downstream portion of said communications network and said upstream portion of said communications network by disabling a port of said network element coupled to a second link between said network element and a downstream portion of said communications network, wherein  
said second link is associated with said virtual network, and  
said port of said network element is disabled as a result of said port being associated with said virtual network.
2. **(Original)** The method of claim 1, wherein  
said downstream portion of said communications network comprises a redundantly-linked network element.
3. **(Original)** The method of claim 2, wherein  
said redundantly-linked network element comprises a protocol stack including a first protocol stack layer and a second protocol stack layer,  
said first protocol stack layer is associated with one or more applications, and  
said disabling comprises notifying said second protocol stack layer of said failure.
4. **(Original)** The method of claim 3, wherein  
said network element comprises a primary network element,

said method further comprises enabling a third link between said redundantly-linked network element and a secondary network element, and  
    said secondary network element is coupled to said upstream portion of said communications network using a fourth link.

5.     (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein said redundantly-linked network element comprises a multi-homed endstation.
6.     (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein said network element comprises a datalink layer network element.
7.     (Original) The method of claim 6, wherein said datalink layer network element comprises an Ethernet switch.
8.     (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein said upstream portion of said communications network comprises a network layer network element.
9.     (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein said disabling comprises:  
        disabling a plurality of links between said network element and a plurality of redundantly-linked network elements.
10.    (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein said disabling comprises:  
        disabling a link of a plurality of links between said network element and a plurality of redundantly-linked network elements.
11.    (Cancelled)
12.    (Cancelled)
13.    (Currently Amended) The method of claim 2, wherein said disabling comprises:  
        disabling said port of said network element coupled to said second link  
        between said network element and said downstream portion of said communications network within a period of time substantially less than or equal to 50 milliseconds of said detecting.

14. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 2, wherein said disabling comprises:  
disabling said port of said network element coupled to said second link  
between said network element and said downstream portion of said  
communications network within a period of time substantially less than or  
equal to 2 seconds of said detecting.
15. **(Currently Amended)** An apparatus comprising:  
means for detecting a failure of a first link, wherein  
said first link is between a network element and an upstream portion of a  
communications network, and  
said first link is associated with a virtual network; and  
means for maintaining a communications channel between said downstream  
portion of said communications network and said upstream portion of said  
communications network by disabling a port of said network element  
coupled to a second link between said network element and a downstream  
portion of said communications network, in response to said failure,  
wherein  
said second link is associated with said virtual network, and  
said port of said network element is disabled as a result of said  
port being associated with said virtual network.
16. **(Original)** The apparatus of claim 15, wherein  
said downstream portion of said communications network comprises a  
redundantly-linked network element.
17. **(Original)** The apparatus of claim 16, wherein  
said redundantly-linked network element comprises a protocol stack including a  
first protocol stack layer and a second protocol stack layer,  
said first protocol stack layer is associated with one or more applications, and  
said means for disabling comprises means for notifying said second protocol stack  
layer of said failure.
18. **(Original)** The apparatus of claim 17, wherein

said network element comprises a primary network element,  
    said apparatus further comprises means for enabling a third link between said  
        redundantly-linked network element and a secondary network element,  
        and  
    said secondary network element is coupled to said upstream portion of said  
        communications network using a fourth link.

19. (Original) The apparatus of claim 16, wherein said redundantly-linked network element comprises a multi-homed endstation.

20. (Original) The apparatus of claim 16, wherein said means for disabling comprises:

    means for disabling a link of a plurality of links between said network element  
    and a plurality of redundantly-linked network elements.

21. (**Cancelled**)

22. (**Cancelled**)

23. (**Currently Amended**) The apparatus of claim 16, wherein said means for disabling comprises:

    means for disabling said port of said network element coupled to said second  
    link between said network element and said downstream portion of said  
    communications network within a period of time substantially less than or  
    equal to 50 milliseconds of said failure.

24. (**Currently Amended**) The apparatus of claim 16, wherein said means for disabling comprises:

    means for disabling said port of said network element coupled to said second  
    link between said network element and said downstream portion of said  
    communications network within a period of time substantially less than or  
    equal to 2 seconds of said failure.

25. (Currently Amended) A machine-readable storage medium having a plurality of instructions executable by a machine embodied therein, wherein said plurality of instructions when executed cause said machine to perform a method comprising:

detecting a failure of a first link, wherein

    said first link is between a network element and an upstream portion of a communications network, and

    said first link is associated with a virtual network; and

    in response to said detecting, maintaining a communications channel between said downstream portion of said communications network and said upstream portion of said communications network by disabling a port of said network element coupled to said second link between said network element and a downstream portion of said communications network, wherein

    said second link is associated with said virtual network, and  
said port of said network element is disabled as a result of said  
port being associated with said virtual network.

26. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable storage medium of claim 25, wherein

    said downstream portion of said communications network comprises a redundantly-linked network element.

27. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable storage medium of claim 26, wherein

    said redundantly-linked network element comprises a protocol stack including a first protocol stack layer and a second protocol stack layer,  
    said first protocol stack layer is associated with one or more applications, and  
    said disabling comprises notifying said second protocol stack layer of said failure.

28. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable storage medium of claim 27, wherein

    said network element comprises a primary network element,

said method further comprises enabling a third link between said redundantly-linked network element and a secondary network element, and  
said secondary network element is coupled to said upstream portion of said communications network using a fourth link.

29. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable storage medium of claim 26, wherein said redundantly-linked network element comprises a multi-homed endstation.

30. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable storage medium of claim 26, wherein said disabling comprises:

disabling a link of a plurality of links between said network element and a plurality of redundantly-linked network elements.

31. (Cancelled)

32. (Cancelled)

33. (Currently Amended) The machine-readable storage medium of claim 26, wherein said disabling comprises:

disabling said port of said network element coupled to said second link between said network element and said downstream portion of said communications network within a period of time substantially less than or equal to 50 milliseconds of said detecting.

34. (Currently Amended) The machine-readable storage medium of claim 26, wherein said disabling comprises:

disabling said port of said network element coupled to said second link between said network element and said downstream portion of said communications network within a period of time substantially less than or equal to 2 seconds of said detecting.

35. (Currently Amended) A data processing system comprising:  
a redundantly-linked endstation; and  
a network element configured to

detect a failure of a first link, wherein  
said first link is between said network element and an upstream  
portion of a communications network, and  
said first link is associated with a virtual network, and  
in response to said failure, maintain a communications channel between  
said redundantly-linked endstation and said upstream portion of  
said communications network by disabling a port of said network  
element coupled to said second link between said network  
element and said redundantly-linked endstation, wherein  
said second link is associated with a virtual network, and  
said port of said network element is disabled as a result of said  
port being associated with said virtual network.

36. (Original) The data processing system of claim 35, wherein  
said network element comprises a primary network element,  
said redundantly-linked endstation is configured to enable a third link between  
said redundantly-linked endstation and a secondary network element, and  
said secondary network element is coupled to said upstream portion of said  
communications network using a fourth link.
37. (Original) The data processing system of claim 35, wherein  
said network element comprises an Ethernet switch.
38. (Currently Amended) A data processing system comprising:  
a redundantly-linked endstation;  
a primary network element, wherein  
said primary network element is coupled to an upstream portion of a  
communications network using a first link, wherein said first link  
is associated with a virtual network,  
said primary network element is coupled to said redundantly-linked  
endstation using a second link, wherein said second link is  
associated with said virtual network, and

said primary network element is configured to  
detect a failure of said first link, and  
disable a port of said primary network element coupled to said  
second link to maintain a communications channel between  
said redundantly-linked endstation and said upstream  
portion of said communications network in response to said  
failure, and  
said port of said primary network element is disabled as a  
result of said port being associated with said virtual  
network; and

a secondary network element, wherein  
said secondary network element is coupled to said redundantly-linked  
endstation using a third link.

39. (Original) The data processing system of claim 38, wherein  
said redundantly-linked endstation is configured to enable said third link, and  
said secondary network element is coupled to said upstream portion of said  
communications network using a fourth link.

40. (Original) The data processing system of claim 38, wherein  
said primary network element comprises an Ethernet switch.

41. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said second link is a downstream link  
that is individually predetermined by a configuration interface.

42. (Original) The apparatus of claim 15, wherein said second link is a downstream link  
that is individually predetermined by a configuration interface.

43. (Original) The machine-readable storage medium of claim 25, wherein said  
second link is a downstream link that is individually predetermined by a configuration  
interface.

44. (Original) The data processing system of claim 35, wherein said second link is a downstream link that is individually predetermined by a configuration interface.

45. (Original) The data processing system of claim 38, wherein said second link is a downstream link that is individually predetermined by a configuration interface.

46. (**Cancelled**)

47. (**Cancelled**)

48. (**Cancelled**)

49. (**Cancelled**)

50. (**Cancelled**)

51. (**Currently Amended**) The method of claim 1, wherein said disabling further comprises:

disabling said port of said network element coupled to said second link on-demand, in response to analyzing a plurality of system attributes.

52. (**Currently Amended**) The apparatus of claim 15, wherein said means for disabling further comprises:

means for disabling said port of said network element coupled to said second link on-demand, in response to analyzing a plurality of system attributes.

53. (**Currently Amended**) The machine-readable storage medium of claim 25, wherein said disabling further comprises:

disabling said port of said network element coupled to said second link on-demand, in response to analyzing a plurality of system attributes.

54. **(Currently Amended)** The data processing system of claim 35, wherein said network element is further configured to:

disable said port of said network element coupled to said second link on-demand, in response to an analysis of a plurality of system attributes.

55. **(Currently Amended)** The data processing system of claim 38, where said primary network element is further configured to:

disable said port of said primary network element coupled to said second link on-demand, in response to an analysis of a plurality of system attributes.

56. **(New)** The method of claim 2, further comprising:

said redundantly-linked network element failing back to said second link when  
said first link and said second link become operational again.

57. **(New)** The apparatus of claim 16, further comprising:

means for failing back said redundantly-linked network element to said second  
link when said first link and said second link become operational again.

58. **(New)** The machine-readable storage medium of claim 26, wherein said method further comprises:

said redundantly-linked network element failing back to said second link when  
said first link and said second link become operational again.

59. **(New)** The data processing system of claim 35, wherein said redundantly-linked endstation is configured to fail back to said second link when said first link and said second link become operational again.

60. **(New)** The data processing system of claim 38, wherein said redundantly-linked endstation is configured to fail back to said second link when said first link and said second link become operational again.